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ABSTRACT

Many have regarded the recent civil disturbances in Los Angeles (California) as a wake-up call, a warning that the deterioration of America's cities, education systems, and public services, and the continuing decline of the underclass may result in a race war that could destroy society. The wake-up call is directed primarily at middle-class black America, specifically at females, because African American women constitute 52 percent of the black adult population and far outnumber black men in administrative positions in higher education. The undeclared but obvious alienation between poor and middle income blacks may be one of the gravest by-products of upward mobility in black America. Black people have to begin relying on themselves again, using the initiative and energy that have characterized the black struggle in a legally segregated nation. No institution in society has ever been an adequate substitute for strong, responsible, intelligent, and loving parents. In inner-city families, some children, without parental guidance, have turned to gangs and drugs. A renewal of independence in the black community begins with parents and their participation in the schools. Community colleges have an important role to play through demanding high achievement and setting standards. The wake-up call to black Americans can only be sounded by the black community. (SLD)

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Forum #58

A WAKE UP CALL FOR MIDDLE-CLASS BLACK AMERICA

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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CIVIC ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN WARNING THAT THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN LOS ANGELES' INNER-CITY, AS WELL AS ALL OF THE MAJOR CITIES OF OUR COUNTRY, HAVE BEEN READY TO ERUPT SINCE THE NON-RECOVERY OF THE WATTS RIOTS NEARLY A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO.

SINCE THE CIVIL UNREST THAT TOOK PLACE IN LOS ANGELES THIS PAST SPRING, CIVIC EXPERTS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS, AND EVEN CASUAL OBSERVERS HAVE DECLARED THAT THE DEVASTATION THAT CAUSED NEARLY 55 DEATHS, HUNDREDS OF INJURIES AND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN PROPERTY DAMAGE AND LOSSES WAS A "WAKE UP" CALL.

A "WAKE UP" CALL THAT DEMANDS THAT THE DETERIORATION OF AMERICA'S CITIES, ITS EDUCATION SYSTEMS, ITS OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES AND THE CONTINUING DECLINE OF THE UNDER-CLASS BE ARRESTED BEFORE WE END UP HAVING A CLASS AND RACE WAR THAT MAY ULTIMATELY DESTROY ALL OF SOCIETY.

WE ARE FURTHER BEING WARNED THAT THE SOCIAL CONDITION THAT CAUSED LAST SPRING'S DISRUPTION IS BUT THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG AND THAT VIOLENCE IN OUR URBAN CENTERS IS NEVER MORE THAN THE NEXT INCIDENT AWAY, YET, IN THE MOST SOPHISTICATED NATION IN THE WORLD, NO MATTER HOW DRAMATIC THE "WAKE UP" CALL OR HOW RELIABLE THE SOURCE, THE POWER STRUCTURE OF OUR MAJOR CITIES----THE INFLUENTIAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE RECOGNIZED CIVIC LEADERS----ARE SIMPLY

GOING ALONG WITH "BUSINESS AS USUAL." WE IGNORE THE CAUSES OF UPHEAVAL IN OUR CITIES AS THOUGH CONDITIONS WILL CORRECT THEMSELVES. YET WE KNOW NOTHING COULD BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH.

THE ISSUE OF THE "WAKE UP" CALL CAN HAVE VERY DIFFERENT MEANINGS FOR DIFFERENT INTEREST GROUPS. HOW POLITICIANS OR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY PERCEIVE THE "WAKE UP" CALL IS PROBABLY VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE PERCEPTIONS HELD BY OTHER INTEREST GROUPS.

THE "WAKE UP" CALL THAT I HEAR, AT LEAST ONE OF THEM, IS DIRECTED PRIMARILY AT MIDDLE-CLASS BLACK AMERICA. THERE MAY BE WARNINGS BEING POSTED FOR OTHER MINORITY GROUPS AND THERE ARE NO DOUBT MANY COMMON CONCERNS AMONG MINORITIES BUT I AM INCLINED TO BELIEVE

THAT THE "WAKE UP" CALL FOR BLACKS MAY BE DIFFERENT THAN THE CALLS BEING HEARD BY OUR LATINO BROTHERS AND SISTERS, OUR ASIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS OR THE AMERICAN INDIAN. AND THE LEADERSHIP ROLE THAT FEMALE BLACK LEADERSHIP ASSUMES DURING THE WEEKS, MONTHS AND YEARS AHEAD WILL BE CRITICAL TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THIS NATION AS WE ENTER THE 21ST CENTURY. FIRST, BECAUSE AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN NOW CONSTITUTE 52 PERCENT OF THE BLACK ADULT POPULATION.

I ALSO EMPHASIZE FEMALE BLACK LEADERSHIP BECAUSE FRANKLY IN OUR URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES, THE NUMBERS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS IS NOW FAR GREATER THAN THOSE FOUND AMONG OUR BLACK BROTHERS. THERE ARE NOW 25 BLACK FEMALE

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE PRESIDENTS, WHILE THERE ARE ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 100 BLACK MALE CEOS IN FOUR- AND TWO-YEAR SCHOOLS COMBINED.

ONLY THE MOST NARROW-MINDED, REGARDLESS OF RACE, WOULD DENY THAT THE HISTORY OF BLACKS IN AMERICA IS A MOST REMARKABLE PHENOMENON. ARTHUR HACKER, AUTHOR OF, BLACK AND WHITE----SEPARATE, HOSTILE, UNEQUAL, STATES THAT, "BLACK AMERICANS ARE INDEED AMERICANS YET WE STILL SUBSIST AS ALIENS IN THE ONLY LAND WE KNOW. OTHER GROUPS MAY REMAIN OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM, BUT THEY DO SO AT LEAST IN PART VOLUNTARILY. IN CONTRAST, BLACKS MUST ENDURE AN EMOTIONAL SEGREGATION THAT IS FAR FROM FREELY CHOSEN. SO AMERICA TRULY MAY BE SEEN AS TWO VERY SEPARATE NATIONS." A PHENOMENON THAT CONSTANTLY

STRIKES AT OUR PSYCHE WHETHER WE ACKNOWLEDGE IT OR NOT!

ECONOMICALLY, POOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS ARE JUST AS ISOLATED FROM SO-CALLED MIDDLE-CLASS BLACK AMERICANS AS THEY ARE FROM WHITE AMERICA, YET, FOR THE MOST PART, UNDERCLASS BLACKS MUST RELY ON THE GOODWILL OF WHITE AMERICA RATHER THAN THEIR MORE PROSPEROUS BLACK BROTHERS AND SISTERS FOR THEIR ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES----AND YES----THEIR VERY SURVIVAL. THE UNDECLARED BUT EVER MORE OBVIOUS ALIENATION BETWEEN POOR AND MIDDLE INCOME BLACKS MAY BE ONE OF THE GRAVEST BY-PRODUCTS TO RESULT FROM UPWARD MOBILITY OF BLACK AMERICA.

ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A ROCKET SCIENTIST TO SEE THAT THE STRIFE IN LOS ANGELES LAST SPRING HAS MADE THE GULF BETWEEN BLACKS AND BLACKS EVER MORE OBVIOUS WHILE BLACKS AND LATINOS AND BLACKS AND ASIANS ARE NO LONGER SUPPRESSING THEIR HOSTILITY TOWARDS EACH OTHER. IN LOS ANGELES, THE HATRED AMONG RACES OF COLOR, DISTRUST AND OPEN HOSTILITY IS PROBABLY ONLY EXCEEDED BY THE FEAR THAT MOST CITIZENS CARRY WITHIN THEM. - - -YES----UPPITY BLACKS MAY EVEN BE MORE FEARFUL OF POOR BLACKS THAN WHITE FOLKS.

DATA COLLECTED IN A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY BY THE UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF URBAN POVERTY SHOWS, "NO SUBSTANTIAL INDICATION THAT LAST SPRING'S 'WAKE UP' CALL HAS BEEN HEARD." THE SURVEY FOUND NO SHIFT IN PUBLIC

THINKING ABOUT EITHER THE NATURE OF POVERTY OR THE CAUSES OF BLACK/WHITE ECONOMIC INEQUALITY. NEITHER THE DOMINANT POWER STRUCTURE NOR THE VICTIMS OF LAST SPRING'S UPRISING HAVE BEGUN TO CLEARLY AND HONESTLY ADDRESS THE FUNDAMENTAL ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONTINUED BREAKDOWN BETWEEN THE RACES AND ECONOMIC GROUPS.

AND BY THE WAY, LAST SPRING'S UPRISING WAS NOT JUST A BLACK/WHITE THING! SOME OF THE HOTTEST FIRES TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE OF SOUTH CENTRAL L. A.

MIKE DAVIS, AUTHOR OF, <u>CITY OF QUARTZ,</u> WRITES IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES THAT 55.2 PERCENT OF THE 12,545 ARRESTS IN LAST YEAR'S UPRISING WERE MADE OUTSIDE OF LOS ANGELES' CITY LIMITS...DON'T FORGET----VIOLENT DISRUPTIONS AFTER THE FIRST

RODNEY KING VERDICT TOOK PLACE IN LAS VEGAS, ATLANTA, NEW YORK, TORONTO AND SEATTLE...AS DAVIS SAYS, "WE LIVE IN A CITY THAT REFUSES TO HEAR THE CRIES AND WHISPERS OF ITS OWN CHILDREN." THE ANGER AND FEAR THAT PERMEATES OUR MAJOR CITIES IS FAR MORE THAN A WHITE/BLACK THING. THE POVERTY IN OUR CITY IS EVERY BIT AS PERVASIVE AS RACE OR ETHNICITY.

A SERIES OF HEARINGS CONDUCTED BY THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY HAS REVEALED THAT THE CONDITIONS AND CAUSES OF THE APRIL UPRISING WERE THE SAME AS THOSE ATTRIBUTED TO THE WATTS RIOTS OF THE 1960S. HATE, UNREST AND HOPELESSNESS REACHES FAR BEYOND BLACK AMERICA.

WE ALL SEEMED TO HAVE FORGOTTEN A MAJOR ASPECT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT THAT

SUSTAINED IT AND GAVE IT ITS ENERGY IN THE 60S. IT WAS THE ELEMENT OF HOPE THAT WAS EVER PRESENT AS THE STRUGGLE ENSUED. THERE WAS A TIME THAT BLACKS AND ALL OTHER MINORITIES BELIEVED DEEPLY IN THE AMERICAN DREAM----WE BELIEVED IN OUR NATION'S IDEALS AND WE ALSO KNEW THAT WE ALL HAD TO JOIN THE STRUGGLE. THERE WAS FAR MORE SELFLESSNESS AMONG US THAN SELFISHNESS.

PHILLIS WHEATLEY, SOJOURNER TRUTH, ROSA PARKS, CLINITA FORD, MAXINE WATERS, DIANNE WATSON, EVONNE BRATHWAITE-BURKE, AMONG OTHERS, BELIEVED THAT THIS COUNTRY COULD OVERCOME ITS DEEPLY ROOTED CHARACTER FLAWS AND BEGIN BELIEVING IN THE UTTERANCES UPON WHICH THIS NATION WAS FOUNDED. THERE WERE DRAMATIC SACRIFICES MADE DURING THE STRUGGLES

OF THE PAST THREE CENTURIES BECAUSE OF THE HOPE WE ALL HELD.

CHICANOS, HISPANICS, ASIANS AND INDIANS, LIKE AFRICAN-AMERICANS, TRULY WANTED TO BE AMERICANS FIRST.

BLACK FOLKS AND LATINOS NOT ONLY WANTED A PIECE OF THE DREAM----THEY ACTUALLY WANTED TO BE INTRICATELY WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF THIS SOCIETY. BLACKS READILY GAVE UP MANY OF OUR CHERISHED INSTITUTIONS AND ENTERPRISES IN ORDER TO BECOME INTEGRATED AMERICANS----WE TRULY WANTED TO MAKE INTEGRATION WORK. BUT LET ME GET BACK TO THAT IN A MOMENT.

THOSE OF US WHO ARE BLACK EDUCATORS HAVE AN EVER MORE BURDENSOME ROLE AND OUR NEED FOR COURAGE, ENERGY AND CONVICTION MUST

BE AS GREAT NOW AS IT HAS EVER BEEN IN OUR HISTORY AS WE PUT INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE THE STRUGGLE THAT BLACK AMERICA NOW FACES. OUR PURSUIT OF FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND OPPORTUNITY MUST BE TIED TO THE PREPAREDNESS OF ALL BLACK PEOPLE AND ESPECIALLY OUR YOUNG. BLACK EDUCATORS MUST TAKE BLACK CHILDREN BY THEIR HANDS AND HEARTS AS WELL AS BY THEIR MINDS.

I AM NOT ADVOCATING THAT WE RETURN TO A SEGREGATED SOCIETY EITHER BY DEJURE OR DEFACTO BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT A PART OF OUR "WAKE UP" CALL IS SAYING, "BLACK FOLKS YOU HAVE GOT TO BEGIN RELYING ON YOURSELVES AGAIN." FREE CHOICE IN THIS NATION MEANS A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN SIMPLY RELYING ON WHITE AMERICA FOR A FAIR SHAKE. FREEDOM IS MUCH MORE THAN FREE CHOICE, MORE IMPORTANTLY FREEDOM MUST PROVIDE THE

SELF-WILL, THE INITIATIVE, THE ENERGY, THE PRIDE, TO DO FOR OURSELVES MIND YOU AS IF WE STILL LIVED IN A LEGALLY-SEGREGATED NATION. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE VALUE TO BE FOUND IN A STRONG WORK ETHIC----THE VALUE TO BE FOUND IN SETTING A POSITIVE EXAMPLE FOR OUR YOUNG----THE VALUE IN SETTING ACADEMIC STANDARDS THAT DEMAND AS MUCH FROM BLACK STUDENTS AS MAY BE EXPECTED OF WHITES. AND LET'S FORGET ABOUT THE PROMISE OF 40 ACRES AND A MULE. THAT WAS A LOUSY PAY-OFF WHEN IT WAS SPOKEN AND IT ISN'T GOING TO WORK NOW.

IN ORDER TO REGAIN THE INDEPENDENCE THAT OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS WERE REQUIRED TO HAVE, WE HAVE GOT TO CHANGE OUR THINKING ESPECIALLY AS IT RELATES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

PREPARING YOUNG AFRICAN MEN AND WOMEN FOR THE WORLD OF WORK IS NOT ENOUGH. WE NEED TO TEACH ENTREPRENEURSHIP----IMPART WORKING FOR OURSELVES TO YOUNG BLACKS----TO SHOW OUR YOUNGSTERS HOW WE SURVIVED BY CREATING OUR OWN BUSINESSES, OUR OWN SERVICE SECTORS----IN OTHER WORDS MEETING OUR OWN NEEDS----WHEN WHITE AMERICA REFUSED TO PERMIT US TO PARTAKE OF THEIR GOODS AND SERVICES.

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, PROBABLY DURING THE MIDDLE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OR PERHAPS WHEN PASSIVE RESISTANCE AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE WAS REPLACED WITH HARSH RHETORIC, A FORM OF PROTEST THAT DEMONSTRATED MORE PRIDE IN BEING BLACK BUT PLACED FAR TOO GREAT AN EMPHASIS ON BEING ABRASIVE WITHOUT AN EQUAL EMPHASIS ON PREPARATION THROUGH EDUCATION AND

BEING ABLE TO COMPETE IN THE MARKET PLACE; OUR COMPASS SOMEHOW GOT SCREWED UP. THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE "BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL" PART OF THE MESSAGE OR THE "BLACK POWER SALUTE," BUT THEY NEEDED TO BE ACCOMPANIED WITH AN EQUAL EMPHASIS ON RESPECT FOR PARENTS, FAMILY, SCHOOL, THE WORK ETHIC----THOSE INSTITUTIONS THAT NEED NOT BE DEFINED BY RACE OR COLOR. THERE WAS EVEN A TIME DURING THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT WHEN OUR MOST YOUTHFUL LEADERS TRIED TO RENDER THE BLACK CHURCH IRRELEVENT----NOW THE ONLY BLACK INSTITUTION THAT REMAINS INDEPENDENT ANYWHERE IN OUR COMMUNITY. AS A RESULT, THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT BECAME MORE AND MORE STRIDENT AND IN FAR TOO MANY INSTANCES DESTRUCTIVE AND, INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, THE ANGER AND DESTRUCTION ALMOST WAS ALWAYS DIRECTED AT

OURSELVES AND OUR COMMUNITIES - NOT OUR ADVERSARIES. CHILDREN BEGAN TURNING AWAY FROM THE TEACHINGS OF PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS OR THE EXTENDED FAMILY AND THE BLACK CHURCH THAT HAD ACTUALLY BEEN THE SURVIVAL INSTRUMENTS OF BLACK PEOPLE FOR THREE CENTURIES IN THIS LAND. WE (THOSE WHO WERE PARENTS) AWAKENED BRIEFLY IN THE EARLY 1970S TO REALIZE MANY OF OUR BLACK KIDS HAD TURNED AND REJECTED ALL THAT MADE BLACK PEOPLE THE STRONG ENDURING PEOPLE WE HAD TO BE IN ORDER TO SURVIVE----MANY OF OUR KIDS WERE OUT OF CONTROL AND WE SIMPLY RETREATED OR WORSE----JOINED THE MISLEADING CHORUS OF ACCUSING WHITE FOLKS FOR ALL OF OUR ILLS RATHER THAN PREPARING TO COMPETE IN A TOUGH AND UNFAIR WORLD. IT WAS EASIER FOR US AS ADULTS TO DUCK OUR RESPONSIBILITY AND IT WAS NOT LONG

BEFORE A VERY LARGE SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION FEARED ITS YOUNGSTERS.

LIKE OUR WHITE COUNTERPARTS WE LOOKED FOR OTHER AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS TO TAKE UP PARENTING BUT THERE HAS NEVER BEEN AN INSTITUTION CREATED IN OUR SOCIETY THAT IS AN ADEQUATE SUBSTITUTION FOR STRONG, RESPONSIBLE, INTELLIGENT, LOVING PARENTS. IT WAS NOT LONG UNTIL LARGE NUMBERS OF WE BLACK AMERICANS WERE FRIGHTENED OF OUR CHILDREN AND THEN THE FEAR WAS REPLACED BY THE HAVOC THAT ROCKS OUR CITIES TODAY.

HOW DID OUR INNER CITY CHILDREN INTERPRET THIS PARENTAL FEAR? THEY BEGAN BELIEVING THAT WE DID NOT CARE AND SO THEY BEGAN LOOKING FOR SUBSTITUTIONS FOR THE FAMILY.

THE SUBSTITUTION WAS FOUND IN A FOUR LETTER WORD CALLED "GANG" OR A FIVE LETTER WORD CALLED "DRUGS."

DID ALL BLACK FOLKS GO TO SLEEP OR ABANDON THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES? OF COURSE NOT.

THERE ARE LARGE NUMBERS OF BLACKS ACROSS THIS LAND WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE PARENTS DOING ALL OF THE THINGS THAT ANY PARENT WOULD DO TO PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN A VERY COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING SOCIETY AND WHILE SOME OF THOSE BLACK FAMILIES ARE NEITHER WEALTHY NOR HIGHLY EDUCATED, THE MOMENT YOU TRY TO PUT ANY ONE SEGMENT OF ANY GROUP IN SOCIETY IN A BAG YOU WILL MISREPRESENT WHATEVER IT IS YOU ARE TRYING TO CONVEY. HOWEVER, IF THESE ALIENATED YOUTH ARE GOING TO

BE DRAWN INTO CONSTRUCTIVE PATHS OF LIFE, ONE THING IS FOR CERTAIN, THE WHITE POWER STRUCTURE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN----IT MUST BE DONE BY THOSE OF US WHO ARE BLACK.

LET ME RETURN TO THE BUSINESS OF WHAT WE MUST DO TO PREPARE FOR A RENEWAL IN THE INDEPENDENCE IN BLACK COMMUNITIES. IT MAY BE DIFFICULT TO DO EVEN THOUGH IT KIND OF SOUNDS SIMPLE.

FIRST OF ALL, WE MUST ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN THE GROWTH OF OUR CHILDREN FROM THE MOMENT THEY ARE CONCEIVED UNTIL THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL AND DETERMINED FOR THEMSELVES WITH OUR GUIDANCE WHAT DIRECTION THEY WANT TO TAKE AFTER A SUCCESSFUL COMMON SCHOOL CAREER. WHILE

EVERYDAY OF THE LIFE OF OUR CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT, AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOCUS NEEDS TO BE PLACED ON BLACK CHILDREN FROM THE FIRST THROUGH SIXTH GRADES TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THEY HAVE THE BASIC SKILLS; BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE VERBALLY AT LEAST IN ENGLISH. THEY MUST BE ABLE TO LOGICALLY THINK; THEY MUST BE ABLE TO INTERPRET THE WRITTEN WORD AND THEY MUST UNDERSTAND THAT LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL SETTING IS AN ORGANIZED SKILL. AND JUST AS IMPORTANT AS READING, WRITING, MATHEMATICS AND CONVEYING A COHERENT ORAL MESSAGE----WE MUST CONVEY THE TRUE MEANING IN THE PRIDE OF BEING BLACK, THROUGH RECAPTURING THE HISTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF BLACK PEOPLE AT LEAST SINCE THIS COUNTRY WAS STOLEN----AND IDEALLY BACK TO THE TIME OF THE EGYPTIAN PHARAOHS. MIDDLE-CLASS BLACK FAMILIES MUST RETURN TO THE INNER-CITY

BLACK COMMUNITIES AND ESPECIALLY PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF THE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAN ALSO PLAY A MUCH LARGER ROLE IN PUTTING OUR YOUTH ON THE RIGHT TRACK. IN ADDITION TO DEMANDING HIGH STANDARDS OF CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE, WE MUST, BY EXAMPLE, SET STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR THROUGH OUR OWN MODELING. HOW WE AS BLACK PROFESSIONALS BEHAVE IN FRONT OF BLACK STUDENTS CAN HAVE A VERY POSITIVE IMPACT----OR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON BLACK STUDENTS.

I CAN REMEMBER AS A SMALL BOY THAT A PART OF MY UPBRINGING WAS TO ALWAYS SPEAK TO MY ELDERS WHO WERE BLACK WHEN WE MET ON THE STREET, TO SHOW OTHER BLACK PEOPLE AS MUCH COURTESY AS I WOULD MY OWN PARENTS OR

GRANDPARENTS. I DID NOT HAVE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING AND PUT ON MY BLACKNESS. IT WAS TRULY INTERWOVEN THROUGH MY COMPLETE BEING, NOT AS SOMETHING TO BE ANGRY ABOUT OR ASHAMED OF, BUT A PART OF MY ESSENCE TO BE WORN WITH DIGNITY AND HONOR AT ALL TIMES.

I AM NOT HERE TO BADGER, HOWEVER, I BELIEVE IN BEING CRITICAL NOT ONLY OF THE POWER STRUCTURE BUT BY LOOKING INWARD AT SELF. AFRICAN-AMERICANS HAVE THROUGHOUT HISTORY ENJOYED A TALENT FOR COMMUNICATING AND FOR HUMOR. I CAN'T HELP BUT REMEMBER A COMMENT ATTRIBUTED TO LOUIE ARMSTRONG AFTER HE BECAME AN INTERNATIONAL AMBASSADOR OF GOODWILL. THE STORY GOES THAT HE WAS ASKED WHY AFTER WEALTH AND PROMINENCE, WOULD HE CHOOSE TO LIVE OVER A GROCERY STORE IN THE HEART OF THE BLACK

COMMUNITY WHEN HE COULD HAVE LIVED ANYWHERE IN NEW ORLEANS, HE REPLIED BY SIMPLY SAYING, "I LIVE WHERE I LIVE BECAUSE I DIG THE CATS ON THE BLOCK."

HAVE WE AS MIDDLE-CLASS BLACKS FORGOTTEN HOW TO DIG THE CATS ON THE BLOCK OR HAVE WE SIMPLY GONE TO SLEEP? IF WE ARE SLEEPING THROUGH THE MOST COMPLEX TIME IN HISTORY, WE TRULY NEED A "WAKE-UP CALL" THAT CAN ONLY BE SOUNDED BY US.

MIDDLE-CLASS BLACK AMERICA "LET'S WAKE-UP."